

## 2003 National Land Trust Census

As communities across America grapple with how to deal with development sprawl that is eating up two million acres a year, thousands of quiet success stories lie behind the 1,500 land trusts that are effectively conserving farmland, forests, coastal land, and scenic vistas. The Land Trust Alliance's 2003 National Land Trust Census demonstrates the progress made nationwide as a result of these thousands of success stories. These nonprofit groups have doubled the acreage protected just five years ago and are now protecting more than 800,000 new acres each year. Typically, land trusts either acquire land outright or negotiate private, voluntary land agreements (called conservation easements) that limit future development.

The 2003 census identifies two milestones for the private land conservation movement that was established in the United States at the end of the 19th century. A record five million acres were protected through conservation easements, which is more than triple the amount (1.4 million acres) protected five years ago. Local and regional land trusts have now protected 9,361,600 acres of important conservation land, an area four times the size of Yellowstone National Park. This is double the 4.7 million acres protected as of 1998. Although this census tallies data only from local and regional land trusts, national land trusts have protected an additional 25 million acres.

The National Land Trust Census provides an in-depth picture of the voluntary land conservation movement. Substantial growth has occurred in every facet of land trust activity.

**Number of land trusts** has increased 26 percent since 1998, from 1,213 to 1,537 in 2003.

**Total acreage conserved** by local and regional land trusts has doubled, from 4.7 million in 1998 to 9.4 million in 2003. Land trusts holding easements currently number 858.

**Acreage protected by conservation easements** has increased 266 percent since 1998, from 1,385,000 acres to 5,067,929 acres in 2003.

**Total number of conservation easements** is 17,847—up from 7,392 in 1998.

**California, Maine and Colorado lead the nation** in the amount of acreage protected by local and regional land trusts in a state.

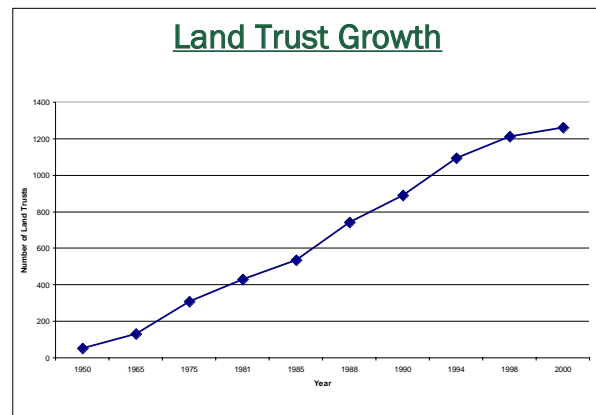
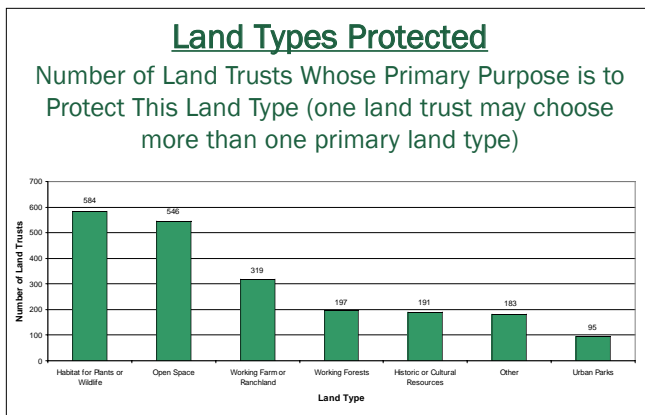
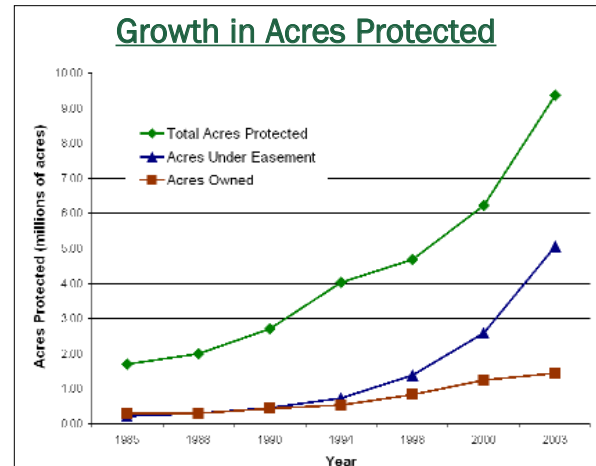
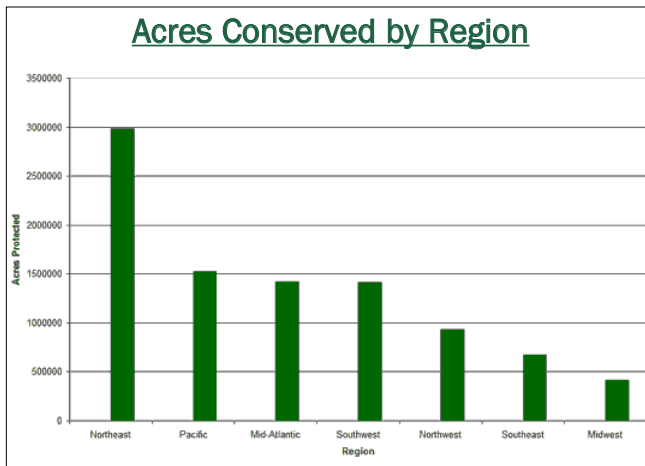
**Land trusts in the Northeast** (ME, NH, MA, NY, CT, VT, RI) protected a total of 2.9 million acres.

**Percentage increase in land protected was highest in the Pacific and Southeast.**

In the Pacific (CA, NV, HI), protected lands jumped 147 percent to 1,521,007 acres, up from 614,796 acres protected as of 1998. In second place, the Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN) experienced a 123 percent increase in protected acreage—648,895 acres in 2003, compared to 291,413 acres five years earlier.

The Southwest (AZ, CO, NM, OK, TX, UT) and Pacific regions saw the most rapid growth in the number of land trusts. Southwest region land trusts numbered 70 in 1998 versus 107 in 2003. Pacific land trusts grew from 127 to 189 over the same period.

California now leads the nation in numbers of land trusts with 173, followed by Massachusetts, the birthplace of land trusts, with 154 nonprofit land conservation organizations. Connecticut is third with 125 land trusts.



More Information on  
[www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)

- Census Press Release
- Census Addendum
- Data Tables
- Defining a Land Trust
- Survey Methodology